

What is the Electoral College?

The Electoral College is the constitutional system for the election of the President and Vice President of the United States. It was established in Article II, Section I, of the U.S. Constitution and has been modified mainly by the 12th Amendment. It is the collective name for a group of electors, nominated by political parties within the states, who meet to vote for these two offices.

Each state is allocated a number of electors equal to the number of its U.S. Senators (always 2) plus the number of its U.S. Representatives. California has a total of 54 electoral votes.

The political parties of each state submit a list of individuals pledged to their candidates for President, equal in number to the number of electoral votes for the state, to the state's chief election official (in California, the Secretary of State). Each party determines its own way of choosing its electors. Members of Congress or employees of the Federal government are prohibited from serving as electors.

After the parties hold their caucuses and the states hold their primaries, the major parties nominate their candidate for the Office of President. The names are then submitted to the state's chief election official as they will appear on the general election ballot.

On the Tuesday following the first Monday of the month of November, registered voters in each state cast their ballots for the Office of President and Vice President. The presidential candidate who gets the most popular votes in a state wins all of the electoral votes for that state except for the states of Maine and Nebraska which award electoral votes proportionately.

On the Monday following the second Wednesday of December, each state's electors meet in their respective state and cast their electoral votes (one for President and one for Vice President). Electors must cast at least one of their two votes for a person outside of their state in order to prevent the election of a President and Vice President from the same state. The electoral votes are sealed and sent to the President of the U.S. Senate and are read aloud to both houses of Congress on January 6. The candidate with the most electoral votes, provided there is an absolute majority (over one half of the total vote), is declared President. Similarly, the vice presidential candidate with the absolute majority of electoral votes is declared Vice President.

In the event no one obtains an absolute majority of electoral votes for President, the U.S. House of Representatives (as the chamber closest to the people) selects the President from among the top three electoral vote getters.

On January 20, at noon, the elected President and Vice President are sworn into office.

Distribution of Electoral Votes

State	1981-1990	1991-2000	State	1981-1990	1991-2000
Alabama	9	9	Montana	4	3
Alaska	3	3	Nebraska	5	5
Arizona	7	8	Nevada	4	4
Arkansas	6	6	New Hampshire	4	4
California	47	54	New Jersey	16	15
Colorado	8	8	New Mexico	5	5
Connecticut	8	8	New York	36	33
Delaware	3	3	North Carolina	13	14
D.C.	3	3	North Dakota	3	3
Florida	21	25	Ohio	23	21
Georgia	12	13	Oklahoma	8	8
Hawaii	4	4	Oregon	7	7
Idaho	4	4	Pennsylvania	25	23
Illinois	24	22	Rhode Island	4	4
Indiana	12	12	South Carolina	8	8
Iowa	8	7	South Dakota	3	3
Kansas	7	6	Tennessee	11	11
Kentucky	9	8	Texas	29	32
Louisiana	10	9	Utah	5	5
Maine	4	4	Vermont	3	3
Maryland	10	10	Virginia	12	13
Massachusetts	13	12	Washington	10	11
Michigan	20	18	West Virginia	6	5
Minnesota	10	10	Wisconsin	11	11
Mississippi	7	7	Wyoming	3	3
Missouri	11	11	TOTAL	538	